

# Impressions of Medical Libraries and Library Science in Latin-America

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AS I STEPPED on board a Pan American strato-clipper on August 2, 1943, I did not realize with what significance I would later come to regard that date—for it marked the beginning of a most interesting experience. This chance to survey medical libraries in three of the South American republics and to actually work in one of them has proved a liberal education for me. Letters from friends and colleagues have indicated that others may be interested in my notes concerning this trip and that is my reason for recording some of them here.

I traveled entirely by air with the exception of a train trip over the Andes into the interior of Peru. The first flight was from Miami to Balboa in the Canal Zone crossing the Caribbean Sea at an altitude of 16,000 feet. The next day our journey was resumed down the West coast of South America. We flew over Colombia and Ecuador, crossed the equator, flew over and along the Peruvian coast and landed in Lima in the late afternoon. I stayed in Peru six weeks. From Peru I flew to Cali, Colombia, then on to Bogotá the next day, for a stop of ten days. Then I flew back to the Canal Zone and the next day continued over Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Honduras to Guatemala where I stayed a couple of days and then flew to Mexico City where I remained two weeks entering the United States by plane at Brownsville, Texas. From Texas to Nashville I travelled by train.

The trip was made under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation and of the Institute of Inter-American Affairs and everywhere I was given the opportunity of meeting and knowing many persons connected with the medical, scientific and literary life of the countries I visited. Everywhere facilities were extended for visiting the universities, medical schools and hospitals.

My primary objective and longest stay was in Lima, Peru, where I acted in the capacity of consultant to Dr. Carlos Monge, Dean of the Facultad de Medicina, Universidad Nacional, Mayor de San Marcos de Lima (fig. 1), in regard to the reorganization of the medical library.

The charter of the famous University of San Marcos was granted

in 1551, and many distinguished persons have taught on the staff of the Facultad de Medicina. One of the most interesting of these was the brilliant and gifted physician Hipólito Unanue frequently designated as "one of the fathers of American medicine." He was a pioneer in inaugurating medical research, a leader of the renaissance of medical teaching in Peru, and it was largely due to his efforts that the Lima Anatomical Amphitheater was organized in 1792, and the San Fernando Medical School, later the Facultad de Medicina, was opened in 1811.

Immediately opposite the entrance to the Facultad de Medicina is a bust of Daniel E. Carrión, the medical student who lost his life when in

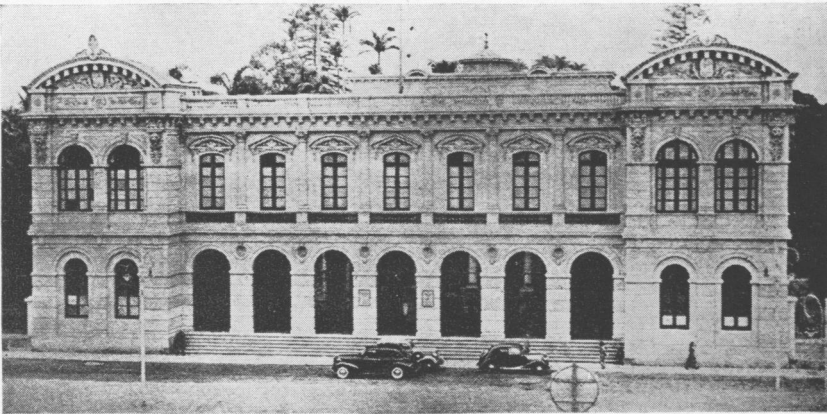


FIG. 1. Façade of the Facultad de Medicina, Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos de Lima.

1885 he inoculated himself at Lima with *Verruga peruana* (*Oroya fever*) in order to verify its infectiousness. Since that time many important studies of this disease have been carried out in Peru.<sup>12</sup>

An interesting review of medical research in Latin America was published by the Pan American Union in 1933,<sup>2</sup> and medical librarians will find it a valuable addition to their collections.

At present some interesting research is being carried out at the Instituto Nacional de Biología Andina which is connected with the Facultad de Medicina. Its laboratories at Huancayo and Morococha are situated high in the Andes, and there Dr. Carlos Monge,<sup>3-6</sup> Dr. Alfredo Hurtado,<sup>7-9</sup> and others working with them, have done many investigations on both the physiology and diseases of life at high altitudes.

I had the opportunity of visiting the laboratory at Morococha. The trip was made in the laboratory automobile, an ascent from less than 500 feet of sea level to approximately 16,000 feet in two hours and a half. Dr. Hurtado who drove proved to be a marvelous chauffeur which



FIG. 2. Guests at farewell luncheon given for the author by the members of the faculty of medicine of the University of San Marcos and their wives at Los Angeles, an Andean mountain resort near Lima.

was lucky for us as the roads were full of breath-taking surprises. I do not believe there is any finer scenery in the world than one finds on this trip. The towering Andes, the Indians in their vivid dress descending the mountain passes with their stately llamas who gaze disdainfully while their masters urge them to the inner side of the road are sights one never forgets. The little crater lakes of an indescribable blue green which nestle among the peaks as you approach the crests and above all the brilliant sun, the cloud effects and the cold fresh air so characteristic of the Andes at that time of year all contributed to a unique experience. Although we carried oxygen none of us had to use it, but on our arrival we found that one of the experimental animals we were carrying up with us had succumbed during the trip. A glance at the animal's lungs after it was sacrificed was enough to make me quite willing to heed admonitions not to "overdo" at first.

The medical library of the Facultad de Medicina in Lima occupies one half of a hollow square surrounding an inside patio in the main building of the medical school. The library is on the second floor and there are wide galleries opening on the patio and here the students frequently sit and study. The building is historically interesting but, from the standpoint of library method, difficult to organize effectively. Since senior students work in the Dos de Mayo Hospital and the Hospital Arzobispo Loayza which are situated at a considerable distance from the school, this decreases the use of the main library, so from every standpoint a new building closer to the Loayza Hospital would be preferable. The library contains many important books and periodicals, but the periodical collections need building up in certain fields.

I usually spent each morning with Miss Margarita Summers working in the library. Miss Summers is now studying at the Western Reserve University School of Library Science prior to taking up her post as Librarian at the Facultad de Medicina Library (Fig. 2. Miss Summers is seated on the ground to the left). Afternoons were spent in appointments and in seeing the various medical institutes and hospitals, as it was necessary to learn something of the medical set-up if plans were to be worked out intelligently. Late afternoons and evenings were spent in social contacts. As I am one of those who believe in working while on the spot and consigning to paper impressions that are still fresh and can be verified on the ground, the writing of reports was wedged into the siesta hour and from 11 P.M. to 1 A.M., the only hours available for this type of work. Plans for reorganization also included sketches for a new library, should a building program become possible. Dr. Monge and the members of the faculty did everything in their power to make my stay pleasant and gave me splendid facilities for work.

Some of the most pleasant contacts I had were with the students. The medical course takes seven years, so there are many more students

at a given time than in our schools, and much of the work of the students in their senior years is equivalent to the duties of an intern in our country. The President and Secretary of the Student Center arranged a picnic for me at the temple of Pachacamac. This marvelous old Inca ruin is on the coast about an hour's drive from Lima. After a tour of the ruins and much discussion of Inca history we had a picnic lunch. During lunch some of the students played their guitars and sang native Peruvian folk songs, and there was dancing.



FIG. 3. Hospital Obrero, Lima, Peru, opened in 1940 and operated under a social security plan.

Among the interesting medical institutions in Lima are the National Institute of Hygiene, the Institute of Social Medicine, the National Radiotherapy Institute, the Cancer Institute, and the National Children's Institute with a special hospital for children.

The Hospital Obrero (Workers' Hospital) is a marvel of modern hospital construction (fig. 3). It was opened in 1940 and contains 650 beds. It operates on a social security plan and smaller hospitals using it as a model, are in the process of construction. The Hospital Arzobispo Loayza has approximately 600 beds and the Hospital Dos de Mayo about 800. There is also a small British-American hospital. This hospital was formerly in Callao, the port of Peru, but when the building was destroyed by the earthquake of 1940, the hospital was transferred to

Lima and is now installed in its new building. Both this hospital and the Obrero hospital have good schools of nursing. There are in all about 19 hospitals in Lima. On the whole, however, facilities and modern equipment for the teaching of medicine have not kept pace with the development of hospitals.

One cannot leave the subject of Lima or Peru without mentioning the splendid museums which display treasures from the ancient Inca and pre-Inca civilizations. The ceramics of the Incas frequently represent human faces and figures that are exceptionally true to life, and some of them record conditions having medical significance. Examples of some of the most interesting have been illustrated in one of the monograph publications of the Museo Nacional with explanatory annotations by Dr. Juan B. Lastres of the Facultad de Medicina,<sup>10</sup> who has also published other works on the history of Inca medicine.<sup>11</sup> The society of medical history of Peru, which was founded in 1939, publishes the *Anales de la Sociedad Peruana de Historia de la Medicina* as its official journal.

I found time before leaving Peru to spend an unforgettable week in the high plateaus of the Andes and in Cuzco, the ancient Inca capital, "ciudad eterna," as the Peruvians sometimes call it. Nothing I could possibly say would in any way prepare you for its charm; it is one of the really rare places left in this world, and let us hope that in these days of rapid change, its beauty and quaintness will remain unscathed. There, miles away from the rest of civilization, are beautiful colonial churches superimposed on ancient Inca foundations and enclosed by ancient Inca walls, and an interesting University dating back to the latter part of the 16th century. Here in colonial days a son of Murillo taught painting in the famous Cuzco School of Art which developed a distinctive style of its own, many examples of which are to be found in Lima and the churches of Peru.

In Bogotá, Colombia, I visited the new Biblioteca Nacional. The mountain views from this lovely modern building are among the most beautiful in Bogotá. The collection contains some excellent historical material and at present it is being classified and catalogued, but the Library is handicapped in this work by a lack of sufficiently trained personnel.

I also saw the new University center which is under construction. There is no central University Library so far, but several smaller libraries which house special collections in different subjects. Some day the University hopes to have a central library. The Medical School collection is of considerable size and is well organized. At present, it is quite far away from the University Center but may be moved there in the future.

Bogotá has several large hospitals, the San José Hospital and the San

Juan de Dios<sup>1</sup> being two of the largest. The San Juan de Dios includes a pavilion for lepers and another for patients with tropical diseases. The Hospital Samaritana is a new hospital which was almost completed at the time of my visit. A new National School of Nursing has recently been established at Bogotá, and I had the opportunity of meeting Miss Helen Howitt and Miss Joanna Schwarte, the two North American nurses who are to direct the school.

The Rockefeller International Health Division Yellow Fever Laboratory was a very interesting place to visit. Important investigations on yellow fever are going on here and the director will not permit visitors who have not been vaccinated against yellow fever to go through the laboratories. These laboratories contain all sorts of queer jungle animals and birds who are being studied as representing possible reservoirs of infection from which mosquitoes can transmit the disease.<sup>14, 15</sup> In this laboratory, I also had the opportunity of seeing the tiny fly, *Phlebotomus verrucarum*, in various stages of its life cycle. This insect is the transmitting agent in *Verruga peruana*—the dread disease of certain Andean valleys. My stay in Bogotá was all too short and I longed for more time to see the many interesting things I had to leave unvisited.

In Mexico City I found many collections rich in biological and medical material. I visited many medical and scientific libraries, among them, the Library of the Hospital General, the University Medical School Library, the Instituto de Biología with its laboratories situated on the lovely lake in Chapultepec Park, the Academia Nacional de Medicina, the Escuela de Salubridad e Higiene, the Departamento de Salubridad Pública, The Instituto de Salubridad y Enfermedades Tropicales, the Academia Nacional de Ciencias, The Instituto Antropológico and many others. This scattering of medical material causes certain difficulties for those engaged in research, and the need for a large central medical library close to the hospitals is realized by those interested in the development of medicine in Mexico City and they hope to be able to organize such a library at some future date.

My visit to the Hospital General included the Typhus Fever Laboratories and the Brucellosis Laboratories where Dr. M. Ruiz Castañeda,<sup>13</sup> a former co-worker of Zinsser's, is carrying on interesting work on these diseases. I visited the Hospital Juarez and the recently opened Hospital del Niño which is modern and beautifully organized. Mexico City is so large and the distances between libraries great, so I found the two weeks' time at my disposal entirely inadequate in which to visit all of the scientific libraries, and medical institutions.

Each of the countries visited had many distinctive characteristics but as I cannot discuss each in detail it might be just as well to summarize certain factors which seemed more or less common to the libraries of all of them. For the greater part the medical libraries showed the

influence of European culture and science, especially French. This was true both in book content and in the pattern of library arrangement, methods and administration. Several factors are responsible, before the beginning of the second World War, many scientists from South America studied in Europe and the ties between France and Peru for example, were especially close, there having been numerous interchanges of professorships, lectureships and scholarships. Moreover, French medical schools invited Peruvian students to attend courses without charge and every effort was made to reduce the travel and living expenses of these students.

The use of French text-books was therefore very natural, particularly as they were furnished at reasonable prices. Today there is much interest in North American books but their widespread use is handicapped by several factors, one being delays and difficulties in transportation due to the war, and even more important the fantastically high prices of our texts in comparison with the living scale of the country. One can hardly expect a struggling young medical teacher, research worker or physician to pay almost a month's salary for a book, even if he longs to own it.

Recently a group of publishers representing various important publishing houses in the United States made a tour of some of the most important Latin American Republics in order to study the situation. At present, the Book Publishers Bureau has a Foreign Trade Committee working on the distribution of books to foreign countries and it is to be hoped they will take steps to solve the problem.

Both in medical and university libraries I found librarians eager to build up their collections of books in the English language. In this connection, the American Library Association—"Books for Latin America Project" is accomplishing a great deal by the distribution of books to various cultural centers including medical and technical books as well as those of purely literary interest.

The question of translations into Spanish and Portuguese is also an important one as there are many practicing physicians and students who cannot read English fluently enough to make use of the original, but again the necessity of making such translations available at low cost is of prime importance. With increased use of texts in English, there is an acute need for good bi-lingual Spanish-English and Portuguese-English medical dictionaries. The only Spanish one available is by Moll,\* it is inadequate, being little more than a vocabulary, was published in 1926 and is now out of print. There is a French-Spanish medical dictionary and a German-Portuguese medical dictionary, but not one of them is really good.

\* Moll, A. A.: Spanish-English medical dictionary. . . . 2d ed. Chicago, American Medical Association, 1926.



In all the countries visited there was a marked interest in the status of librarianship as a profession and in technical training for librarians. Already several schools are being organized and several are already operating. Although some of them are in countries which I did not visit, I think these new developments are of such interest to all librarians that I will discuss them briefly here.

One of the first of these schools was the "Institute" held in Bogotá during the summer of 1942 which lasted six weeks. It was directed by the American Library Association under a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. While such short courses are admittedly inadequate for training purposes, they have awakened great interest in library methods and professional training. This was evidenced by the organization of the *Asociacion de Bibliotecarios de Bogotá* in 1942. The members of this group are actively interested in the advancement of the library profession in Colombia and through the President of their Association, have requested aid in establishing a permanent school of librarianship in Bogotá.

On January 15, 1944, the first course of the *Escuela de Bibliotecarios* opened in Lima. The director of the School is the distinguished Chief of the *Biblioteca Nacional*, Dr. Jorge Basadre. The staff will consist of Peruvian teachers and visiting teachers. Among the North Americans who will serve in that capacity are Dr. Raymond Kilgour, Miss Elizabeth Sherier and Miss Margaret Bates. Dr. Jorge Aguayo of Havana who has studied library science in the United States on a Rockefeller Foundation Scholarship will also teach. Dr. Aguayo is the author of a manual in Spanish on cataloging and classification.<sup>1</sup> There were 300 applications for the course this year, but only 35 students could be accommodated. Preference is being given persons already working in libraries or persons going directly into library positions. Later, after the completion of the new building for the *Biblioteca Nacional* which will replace that destroyed by the disastrous fire of May, 1943, the school will be housed there and can probably take care of more students.

A permanent library school is being organized in connection with the *Escuela de Antropología* in Mexico City. Dr. Rubin de la Borbolla, director of the *Escuela*, is in charge of the new course. Only students who have completed "Preparatoria" will be considered for admission and the course will extend over a three year period. In that time, the students will take a considerable amount of general academic work, i.e. in history, literature, and languages. The total amount of library science will be at least as much as schools in the United States give in the first year. On completing the full three-year curriculum the students will qualify under the law as professional librarians. Special courses will be offered for in-service librarians not seeking degrees.

The Library School of the Escola Livre de Sociologia e Politica in Sao Paulo, Brazil, has been given a grant by the Rockefeller Foundation for a five year period in order to expand the facilities of the school. A one-year course for full time students will be given under the school's director, Dr. Rubens Borba de Moraes. It will be limited to thirty students to be selected from Brazilian library personnel and students who have been selected for library positions. Provision for practical training will be afforded by the Municipal Library of São Paulo.



FIG. 4. Children's Room in the Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin, Mexico City.  
Photograph by courtesy of Dr. Rudolph H. Gjelsness, Director.

From March 23, 1943 to November 27, 1943, a school of Library Science was in progress under the auspices of the Engineer's Association of Uruguay.<sup>16</sup> The school was the result of the efforts of Ing. Federico E. Capurro who for years had been interested in library organization. Arthur E. Gropp, Librarian of the American library, Biblioteca Artigas-Washington, in Montevideo, assisted in the organization. Two North Americans, Jeanne Hereford Williams and Dorothy M. Gropp both with some experience in Latin American libraries were in charge of the practice work and the Ateneo de Montevideo offered the use of its library as a laboratory. From one hundred and fifty applicants fifty-six were selected. Preference was given to library employees and to teachers. Ing. Capurro is trying to get his government to establish a national school of library science as a part of the University of Montevideo.

There will be a six to eight week Library School in Quito, Ecuador, during the coming year. The school will be attached to the Central University of Quito. It will be under the direction of Alfredo Chavez, Librarian of the University Library and Mrs. Dorcas Worsley Reid who has organized the Library of the Cultural Institute in Quito.

At present there are three North American libraries in Latin America, the Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin in Mexico City, the Biblioteca Americana de Nicaragua in Managua and the Biblioteca Artigas-Washington in Montevideo, Uruguay. They are administered under the American Library Association, International Relations Office. An interesting feature is the use of such libraries by children and young people. In September 1943, 1,399 children used the children's room in the Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin and I found this room (fig. 4) one of the most inspiring sights of my trip.

Another interesting and important development is the addition during the past year of Cultural Attachés to the American Embassies. These men are eminent representatives of their professions, including writers, scientists and professors. They are forming close contacts with the cultural life of the countries in which they are living and are interested in seeing that North Americans who visit these countries meet those Latin Americans with whom they would have interests in common. The State Department cannot be too highly commended for its far-sighted policy in sending representatives of their cultural division to other countries. It is a policy which should receive the support of every North American because true international friendship and understanding can be best achieved by the exchange of ideas through the medium of books and the personal contact of those interested in the cultural and intellectual life of our country and that of other countries. The Attachés with whom I came in contact were keenly aware of the value and importance of libraries and were much interested in the developments in this field.

Another interesting group were the medical men working in the various "Servicios Cooperativos Inter-Americano de Salud Publica," the name varying slightly in the different countries. They co-operate with the scientists of the various countries in the study of such problems as malarial control, nutrition—the establishment of small jungle hospitals, better organization of nursing services and many other aspects of public health.

In trying to summarize some of the impressions from my trip certain facts emerge; as far as medical and scientific libraries are concerned, the material is widely scattered. It is not concentrated in the medical school libraries or a large medical society library as is more often the case in North America. Therefore, the building of union catalogs is very important. In Mexico City such a project is already under way with head-

quarters at the Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin. The first libraries being catalogued for inclusion in this union catalog are the medical and scientific libraries. Many of the libraries do not have adequate storage space for books and this overcrowding and lack of modern stack facilities hampers efficient administration.

The medical students do not have adequate access to the books or card catalogs. However, before this could be brought about effectively, there would have to be much careful groundwork done in training the student body to realize the value of the books and their personal responsibility in regard to careful usage of the material available. This arousing of a sense of responsibility and obtaining the interest and cooperation of the students using the libraries should, and must, precede any attempt to give them increased access to material.

In all of the countries visited I found an interest in improving library facilities both general and special. This development has been retarded by the lack of a sufficient number of technically trained assistants but, as previously stated, steps are being taken to remedy this situation.

One of the most important tasks facing the medical libraries in the countries visited is the preparation of an accurate list of their periodical holdings and a list of their "wants." The work on the Union Catalog in Mexico City will be of great assistance in this regard as far as that city is concerned. Many periodicals lack only a few volumes or even issues. Librarians are anxious to complete their North American periodical files but delays in transportation and expense of transportation are hard to overcome. After the war it may be possible to establish some clearing center where the "wants" of South American libraries could be handled, especially for volumes or issues of North American journals.

The librarians and medical people I met were delightful. Everywhere courtesy and kindness was extended to me and everything was done to make my visits pleasant. One of the most agreeable features of my trip was the opportunity to develop personal acquaintances and there are now many individuals whom I regard sincerely as "amigos mios." I have a very real affection for them and I long some day to return to Latin America, and I hope that many of you will also have the opportunity of going there.

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